

## Between the Pieces

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# Between the Pieces

by [Interjection](#)

## Summary

Tommy is five years old when he's stolen as a hostage, six when he escapes, eleven when he gets adopted, sixteen when he chooses his family over a nation, and eighteen when he finally learns the truth of what he really is.

"Of course Tommy's not human!" Dream laughs. It's a wet, hysterical sound - an almost broken one, if Tommy dares analyze whatever incomprehensible nonsense goes on in Dream's mind.

"What do you mean?" he asks instead, and tries to keep the quivering of his heart away from his voice.

Dream pushes up his mask, and sighs. But he doesn't sound angry, or even exasperated. He just sounds... tired.

"Have you ever tried to find, Tommy," he says. "Your biological parents?"

## Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

# oh fair and flighty dove

## Chapter Notes

Tommy was curious as a child.

His world is warm, and small, and right. That is what he knows, barring that the passage of time stretches behind into fading like misty breaths of winter (which he has experienced in sharp tangs of cold on his cheeks while a lulling cradle beneath rocks him back and forth), and that it yawns into the future like his own mouth does every morning.

He blinks his eyes open to a white roof. It's pretty. Speckled black and gray like one of the quail eggs his father once brought him to play with.

His arms raise up, and then curl inward again. It's a few moments of struggle to haul himself up to a sitting position.

He wonders yet again why his arms are so tiny. Never as big as the ones on the people in the storybooks.

Eventually, though, he hits the ground, stands up, and manages to keep his balance.

His father keeps promising he'll eventually grow as big as him, as then be able to stand up whenever he wants - though he's not quite sure he believes him. He doesn't feel bigger at all, and he checks himself every morning.

Oh well.

His room is a mishmash of toys his father has brought him. Little cat dolls and spinning things he doesn't know the name of, puzzles and books of tall, majestic castles. Apparently he lives in one, not that he's seen much beyond the same few rooms his father always insists he stays in. There's the occasional very, very long climb up some giant stairs towards a garden surrounded by stone except from above, from where the sun burns his eyes when he stares too much at it.

It's always "his safety this" or that. Very annoying, if he does say so himself.

So today he resumes his quest. See more of the world! His father is normally here with breakfast by now, but sometimes he's late - like now, and that means he has some time to explore.

He stumbles over to the door, legs wobbly as the jelly he's occasionally given as a snack.

The handle looms above him. It's a bar of silver taunting him with its superior height, slippery edges. He pouts every time he sees it - his father's leaves with a press, but he's too short to do the same.

Again - it's very unfair, if he does say so himself.

He has a plan, though. He's been practicing his jumps every day. Especially on his bed - and from his bed to other places.

His bed is white. White and green, in rippling stripes. The colors look really pretty like that, especially when he pats the blankets flat and nice after he gets out.

It's a shame he has to mess up the neat patterns so much, but oh well. Anything for freedom! It's a noble sacrifice.

He grabs the sides of the long wooden beams that support his mattress and begins dragging.

His arms almost burn again as he keeps pulling, and pulling, and pulling, but the bed moves. Yet another noble sacrifice.

Soon, he's jumping. Up and down and up and down. The mattress sinks and rises with his legs like a bouncy ball.

He giggles. This is super fun - maybe he could get his father to bounce him higher? He really wants to bounce higher. Higher than the ceiling, maybe.

Ooh, what if the ceiling is im-per-me-a-ble? Is that how it goes? He's not sure. But what if he could bounce through it like a ghost and that's how he's supposed to leave?

Wait - leave. He's supposed to be doing that.

The silver handle grows larger before his eyes. He reaches out and slips his fingers around it.

It promptly slips right out of his grasp.

He pouts again. But he's a big man, and he won't let a little failure get to him.

It's coming back up again. This time he reaches higher, grabs a little tighter-

*Click.*

Yes!

He throws himself forward into the open space with a grin-

-and yelps as his face smacks against something hard, smooth, and very, *very* cold.

Now his cheeks *hurt*. And so does his nose, a burning rip like when he accidentally fell off his bed before and had to explain to his father why his nose was crooked and then his father

had to wriggle it back and make him drink a very nasty pink liquid “just in case” or something.

Except his father’s not here to hold him and fix his nose again.

He will be soon though! After he’s looked around he’ll just go back to his room and pretend he’s been a good little boy.

Nodding resolutely, he drags himself up.

A wall of gray hits his eyes.

It’s all gray - dark gray and light gray and all the shades between, just like the walls of the castles in the picture books.

He reaches out a hand, floating forth like bubbly clouds to press against the gray.

It’s cold. So cold.

He pulls back, blinking.

The walls of his room are never cold, but instead warm and hugging like his father’s arms. Always soft fluff and nice to touch.

But these walls, this floor - they’re so cold. The air itself sinking frost into his bones.

He glances around. In either direction are two hallways stretching out to... he doesn’t know. That’s the whole point of this - he doesn’t know, and he’s going to find out.

But... it’s cold.

He frowns, blinking - and then realizes he’s taken a step back into his warm, warm room.

A strange sort of resolve fills him. He’s a big man, strong as his father. He’s not going to let a little cold bother him!

Right. He can do this. It’s just some walking, after all - so in which direction?

Oh, it’s like that poem with the two roads! They diverged and - and - the author traveled the one less traveled by? Isn’t that how it went? He’s not sure, he was very sleepy when his father read it to him.

He glances back and forth one, twice. Soft curls brush against his eyes and he smooths his hair back.

Left, he decides. That direction seemed less traveled.

Though really, they look about the same.

About twenty minutes of aimless wandering, he wonders if he should have just stayed in his room.

It's not the cold - again, he can handle the cold! He can handle a lot of stuff!

Not the way his feet are so sore, though. He doesn't have shoes, and only a pair of woolly green socks with cats on them. Which are very comfortable, but do increasingly little to soothe the way the soles of his feet buzz like a stinging wound.

He should be back in his room by now. But the castle, as it turns out, is huge.

He's probably just lost in its halls. He's very, very sure he's seen that portrait of the funky man with white-rimmed goggles more than once. A lot of times, actually, unless this castle also has many identical portraits of funky men with white-rimmed goggles.

It's not his fault the place is so hard to travel! The halls twist everywhere and the walls follow in cracked gray confusion. They split into more halls and walls so very randomly, and sometimes curve back on each other. Or on other halls and walls.

Hah - halls and walls. At least he's not taking a fall!

He considers himself a good poet. The best one.

But right now, he just *can't* find his room again. Which is really, really annoying.

Maybe if he stays still long enough, his father will come get him?

His legs are really, really tired anyway. And his feet feel like they're *screaming* at him through the socks. So he might as well.

He stumbles against a wall - gray and cold, just like when he first touched it - and something squeaks.

He jumps back with a stuttered yelp.

The walls can talk?

Wait - it's - it's something else? A faint, metallic squeaking that's more like singing now that he's paying attention. And it's getting closer.

Oh, it has to be his father! A while ago he started showing him knives - how to stab, cut, throw - though he was always annoyed they got taken away afterwards and he wasn't allowed to practice.

But he remembers! It's the singing sound of knives against each other, sliding and sparring. He finds it a bit strange, really.

The singing jumps in volume, almost wringing out another yelp. But it doesn't, because he's so very strong!

All the previous pain flows out his legs like a river. He sprints towards the sound, around the cold gray corner-

It's not his father.

Two women stare back at him, one with knives in her hands and the other with rope slung over her shoulders in thick, snaky coils. Wide eyes then narrow down to apple seeds in a few short seconds.

One takes a step forward.

They're nothing like his father, golden as the sun and green as meadow paintings. They're - they're-

He takes a step back and suddenly feels very, very afraid.

A hand is clamped over his mouth before he can scream, impossibly fast-

And there's something sickly sweet shoved beneath his nose and the hand lets go but as soon as he takes a breath he's choking and stumbling and the cold gray floors are falling to meet his nose again and with a tiny, twitching gasp he's being rolled into the darkness.

~\*~

This morning he makes the daily trek down to the deep, dark recesses of the maze beneath the castle. His steps are a lilt faster than usual, with the rising haste of someone who feels disaster on the horizon but who has neither the means to prove or prepare for it.

He's here later than usual, which would usually be fine. But the report of the break-in reached his ears just minutes before.

And when he reaches the room the door is open. They're so many doors and so many rooms and so many halls and yet *this* one, of all of them, is open.

The halls are quiet. The walls cold, gray, and revealing nothing.

There's a bed by the door.

*Well*, he thinks, struggling to simmer down the stew of fury and panic beneath his chest. *At least he found a way to leave first.*

# aerolite above

## Chapter Notes

An escape, and a non-discovery.

He misses the time when his feet hurt from running across too-hard floors.

At least back then it was just his feet. Now his whole body hurts. Constantly.

It's been two weeks since he left his room, wandered around the castle, and gotten kidnapped by the two strange women who then brought him to other strange women and also men, and they oohed and aahed at him for a good few hours before shoving him in this wood box with absolutely nothing except his clothes.

He knows it's been two weeks because he counts very carefully the amount of times he's fed - once a day with cubes of yellow carrots - and scratched the days in lines against the wood. Just like how that one kidnapped prince did in that story, where he couldn't see any change of light, because he was kept in the bowels of a gigantic warship as a prisoner and there's also an angel who killed a dragon and - actually, he's forgotten how the rest of the story went.

He can't see dawning sunlight or dusking darkness either, so he's also probably not being held in a place outside.

He's definitely not on solid land, though. The world rocks back and forth like two lullabies crashing together, always jostling him in and out of fitful sleep. He's probably on a ship, actually.

That, or a really, really big wagon. He can't think of much else - not that he really knows what being on either is like, really, so he can't confirm. What else could this rocking be?

He was very sleepy before he just woke up, dreaming of green and white walls, soft blankets and hands that never slap or grip him so tight purple inks its way in throbbing splotches across his body.

But there's something different this time - and now, he's no longer so sleepy. In fact, he's very, very awake.

Because the world is still. Still as the ground, as the cold gray walls.

He manages to scrabble up to a standing position. The box is just big enough for him to lie down on, and stand up in. At least he has that small comfort.



He knows, has always known on some instinctual, primal level writhing deep within him, that the shelter of his soft green room will not last. Could not last. That something will break eventually, and him along with it.

But he hadn't expected it to come so soon. It *shouldn't* have come so soon.

He's scared. A numb sort of scared, like the fear is held back by parchment paper thin as glassfly wings, already cracked in its shadowed corners. A walled fear frosted around its edges and drifting towards the flames.

His world thumps, jarring his head against the wood. He bites back a whimper as something sticky wet and red as blood rolls down his cheek.

He can't cry. He's a big man. So he can't cry.

He'll be fine, anyways. He'll be...

He has to be fine. Things will turn out fine, won't they? His father can - will-

Ships and castles. Two weeks.

He slides down, legs bunching up. Tries to wipe the wet away from his cheeks.

He's young - so young. He knows. He's not stupid.

How will his father find him? He clearly wasn't supposed to be here in the first place. And being worried sick won't teleport either of them to each other.

His world jumps up and down again - and then, it starts moving. Bumping. Not like before, but - somewhat steadier. Sharper. And more rumbly.

Oh. Is this what being on a wagon is like?

Wait! He's on a wagon. Which means he's not on a ship anymore. And that he's probably far, far away from his father and the castle and heading towards wherever these strange men and women are taking him.

He nibbles his lower lip. He really doesn't want to be wherever they're taking him. But his father's probably not coming.

He's cold too, but at least he has clothes. And the chunks of weird yellow carrots he's been fed still sits, lightly but strangely present, in his belly.

He closes his eyes, does a few minutes of very, very hard thinking, and comes to one conclusion: he has to get out of here.

Of course, it's a conclusion he's reached before. Two weeks is an awfully long time to be trapped in a box. It's not very fair or nice at all.

The world's not very fair or nice at all either. He knows this the same way he knows the softness of his room wouldn't, couldn't last, the knowledge humming its warning in the very deepest recesses of mind where only innate understanding reaches out from.

So, he has to get out. Hide away. And find some way back to his father, though that idea isn't as appealing as he thinks it should be.

The main problem, of course, is that he's trapped. In a box. With people ready to grab him too tight or maybe stick those pointy knives in him if he gets out.

There's really no way of knowing. Why did they kidnap him anyway? He's not even a prince or princess. They should have just gone to some other castle, in his humble opinion - those stupid goggle paintings couldn't have been worth *that* much.

Something hard thumps the underside of his box.

He blinks. He knocks against the wood below once, twice. They thud hollowly back at him, as if mocking his inability to smash through.

Well. That's rude.

He crouches down and presses his left cheek against the wood.

Every vibration of the box suddenly thrums against him, like a tiny, roiling ocean crashing its tides through his body. It's oddly soothing, the lullabies finally merging into an almost proper duet as it rattles along the beat.

The wood is hard. And cold, so cold, colder than it should be by so much - but at least it's not gray. It's a pale white tinged with yellow instead. That's an improvement.

The ocean sinks its waves through him. He presses deeper, further, his vision the darkness of starless nights and his body floating through the void. Unfeeling, drifting with the composition of nothingness as it melts deeper and deeper into the ocean.

Escape. Done. The rumbling seas, endless night. They drift in tandem with the fading screams of things long dead and-

-it's so soft. It's so cold. Strange and yet so right and he wants to, *needs* to unravel further into the abyss...

He raises his head up like the sun in complete, utter silence. His eyes are blown wide as the dawn.

He is on a road, like in the picture books. Cobbly and smeared with loose dirt, grass tufts, lines and footsteps marring all they can and everything more full of color than any painting he's ever seen.

The sky is blue, like he has been told, the kind of soft, aimless blue he has only felt in that stuffed rabbit his father had brought him just days before he had been taken.

But. Stranger than all that - his world is still.

Not still in life, because something he thinks has to be wind slices past his cheeks dotted with purple, and forests are swaying vibrant green oceans along with them (oceans, and starless nights, and what? What is that?).

But the ground is still. And his world is no longer turning, rising, raising up and down with the waves.

He pushes himself up some more, elbows supporting his sprawling body. Glances around - forest in all directions, the path below bumpy and gray (but it's a warmer, nicer gray, somehow) and stretching beyond in two directions, bending into the undergrowths.

The white shirt he has on, the same one from the day he was taken - clings dust and gravel and bits of wet mud to him. His pants do as well, loose slacks of green that run all the way down to his feet.

His feet, with no shoes and two fluffy socks that are now no longer so fluffy, but instead matted flat and feeling so very icky with smears of gray and brown on the poor cats' faces.

"Where am I?" he wonders.

A finger pokes the ground, and comes back stained brown and indented with a bit of stone that's flicked off.

It hurts a bit now.

He stands up. The wind is - not cold, but sharp. And hurting his cheeks, his arms. Like he's a melon about to be sliced for practice.

He takes a deep breath.

He is alone. He's outside the castle. There is a road, which is really two roads for him because they stretch on in either direction. The trees say nothing but thoughtless whispers and the wind hurts him in sharp, erratic lashes.

He reached through the ocean, became the ocean, and is now no longer with the ocean, just like before.

He is alone.

His father is probably not coming for him.

He is alone.

Something long and pink is wriggling against one of his fingers.

He is alone.

He sits down again, pants collecting dirt and stone so warm and yet so *wrong*, and tries not to cry.

# the only star i see

## Chapter Notes

Philza Minecraft, professional child collector (also war criminal).

“Three pieces? For silk of *this* high quality?” Tommy scowls at the marbled coins on the counter like they’ve personally insulted him and his entire non-existent family line.

“I know it’s of very fine make,” the clothier says, shrugging her shoulders back in a way so relaxed Tommy knows she’s not budging. “It’s also very old and worn. You should consider yourself lucky I haven’t called any authorities yet.”

Tommy knows the picture he paints - ragged to the bone, and clashing with contradictions that can only come from piecing his life together with the parts of others.

His cheeks too full to be starving, clothes too clean and well-made for even the middle class, but he also brims with manners to brusque and positions too flighty to be of any importance.

A thief - and a rather successful one, not that he flashes it outside of business. Better to let people see him as a pathetic little child, after all.

“Like the authorities will bother to track these down,” Tommy snorts now that the cover is pretty much blown, winding a finger through the soft fabrics once more. A white silken nightshirt, and soft green pants to match. Both the tiny sizes of five-year olds.

Ironically, they’re the only items in his possession that *aren’t* stolen. He’s not sure why they’ve been kept for so long - they could have been sold much sooner, when he first began grasping all the avenues to survive in this cold, wide world, and probably for much more.

But - well. He’s selling them now, and that’ll be that.

The clothier sighs and pushes another coin onto the counter.

“Four pieces,” she says with the firmness of oak wood. “Last deal.”

Four pieces. It’s now roughly half a piece for a loaf of bread - ridiculous prices, but it’s not like anyone wished for a bad harvest this year.

Four pieces is actually pushing the value of these clothes, Tommy knows. If they had been brand new and soft, they could have fetched up to two hundred pieces - but they’re not. They’re the opposite, dirtied and worn and ripped into rags around all corners just like him.

“Fine,” he grouches out, and swipes the coins off the counter.

He doesn't look back as he stalks out the shop.

Well. They're now sold - the last connection to whatever world he was in, before everything rumbled and then stilled again, and he found himself stumbling down the roads and into cities and taking and taking all the while.

Some might have made a metaphor about taking like the world has taken from him. Tommy is under no such illusions.

His early life - very, very early life - was warm. And soft. And safe. He remembers little. A silver handle, cold gray walls, goggles(?), thoughts of castles and pictures books, and then-

A wood box. Oceans. Starless nights. Things he doesn't know and didn't have the mind to wonder for.

Those child nightclothes must have been fucking expensive. And yet they were his, he knows.

So, he supposes he has had an overall better life than the native-born street orphans, even if chances are his parents are probably not dead. Probably didn't even abandon him - what little he remembers points to kidnapping.

He held onto the little shirt and pants for six years in a desperate hope of somehow identifying himself, in case anyone ever comes looking for him.

No one ever did. The older he grows the more he understands how unlikely the prospect really is - he's about eleven now, and he's finally decided to call that hope quits.

However much the idea leaves him cold, that he's destined to wander alone for the rest of his life.

As if on cue, a shiver racks his body. Tommy brushes away snowflakes already accumulating on his hunter's cap - stolen from some poor, now hatless idiot just yesterday - and makes his way back to his shelter.

His life's not even as bad as it is for some others, really. By virtue of sharp eyes and even sharper reflexes, he's managed to steal his way into an amount of wealth greater than even some of full-time farmers, or craftsmen around the city.

He has decent clothes - the fur hat, white gloves and black pants of thick wool, two linen shirts stacked on each other and a leather coat several sizes too big for him, reaching down to his knees. He has some money holed away, a bracelet and few rings that can still be pawned off.

Money's been scarcer lately with the recent famine, though. Fewer ignorant tourists, almost always from secluded nobility and easy to rob. People hold their coats tighter to their frames, valuables locked away or curled off with wary hands like eagles guard their chicks.

Winter is already more difficult to manage - less food, higher prices, more watchful targets. For the first time in two years, Tommy might have to resort to stealing from more dangerous

targets.

That's fine, though. Because Tommy knows he has one more weapon up his sleeve - a quite frankly ridiculous amount of luck.

Well, luck probably isn't the right word. It definitely goes beyond luck - but he's not quite sure how to describe it otherwise.

His body... *works*, when he needs it to. Like slipping between the fabrics of reality, from one fold to another. Lapsing beneath the ocean and into a different skin, a selkie without known forms.

It's probably something simpler. Tommy doubts he'll ever find much explanation for it.

*Oceans and starless nights.*

He shivers, again, and not entirely from the winter chill.

His shelter comes into sight. It's not home, because he has no home, and he's gotten chased out of previous locations by either force or need too many times to get attached. But it works, for now.

A messy lean-to of wood and rags and a straw glued together with mud and determination, crammed against a tower raised high from the rest of the building's roof. He has to spend a minute climbing up.

Basically a glorified bird's nest snuggled against the side of a - church tower? Tommy's not even sure. He cares even less for the Prime God than the clergy.

It works, is the point. The wind gets annoying at times, making the shelter need constant repair, but the protection from the height and obscurity is well worth it.

Most of the city's population follows Mianite or Dianite or whatever else that pantheon has to offer, anyway. Thus, the Prime God church built in an unsuccessful attempt at conversion is almost always empty.

Anyway. 4 pieces, for 8 loaves of future bread. Unless the price increases again.

Tommy sighs as he lifts up the fur flaps of his shelter and crawls inside. There's just a few more furs for blankets and to lie on, some dried food arranged in a small chest, and another small chest with the various valuables he can sell later. Just enough room to lie down and sit up in comfortably.

The rest of his life, stretching out before him. He's decently sure other 11 year olds don't think about these matters that often - but then again, something about Tommy has always been twisted different from normal.

Maybe the better living conditions - from better skills and sharper eyes, sharper mind - afford him more room to think of things other than just pure survival and misery.

Oh well. It's getting dark, and he should sleep.

Tommy takes the marble coins out his pocket and drops them into his valuables chest. Shrugs his jacket and furs off of him, rests his head into a sea of more fur - he thinks this one's llama fur, though he can't be sure.

Within minutes, he's asleep.

~\*~

Another day, another stroll down the harbor. Tommy walks with a bit more briskness than usual - winter is deep and long in this north and his coins are drying up.

There's a few targets he's considering - the young man with a purse tucked beneath his fingers, the two young children lugging sacks of potatoes, the merchant trying to sell young puppies to passerbys (a stupid fucking endeavor in the current situation, unless people think the price of puppy meat worth the coin).

Tommy is slinking towards a stray potato sack, hands widening in his pockets, when a flash catches his eyes.

He's very used to the glint of precious metals. And when he turns his head, he has to fight to keep his jaw from dropping.

The man in question is absolutely *dripping* in jewels. His cloak buttons are rings of gold, clinking up and down in rhythm with his steps, muffled by boots of silver lining and steel-toes, outstretched hands glittering in rings indented by gems engraved in tiny symbols. A tiny, flag-shaped ribbon, blue background and white shapes, is pinned against the front of his cloak.

Gold filaments weave a crown shape in his hair, a blond so pale it seems bleached by something darker than just age. And the eyes-

A blue so clear, so full of skies and *starless nights and the vast rips between reality* -

Tommy shakes his head, frowning. He can't afford to get sidetracked.

Anyway, the man's decked out in money. Most give him a wide berth, shoulders hunched warily and footsteps just a pace faster.

Tommy stands still behind a wall corner and waits.

The moment comes suddenly, like it usually does. A head turns to a merchant's cry, hands raise up to reach for the ware, and Tommy is brushing the furred lining in the very next instant.

Cold metal jerks out beneath his fingers. A necklace strap tears, loosening a few pearly beads, and rings of gold slide smoothly into Tommy's own fingers as they're torn away from the cloak.



Not a second later, the back of his own coat is gripped just as tight.

Tommy fights down a curse. He knew he shouldn't have stolen a coat so big to wear.

"Hello mate," his target says. He sounds vaguely amused, as though surprised at a circus show.

At least it's not the purring delight Tommy's sometimes faced with when he gets caught - those people always try to punish him the worst. Not that they usually succeed.

Speaking of which. Two hands grab his own and twist them together behind his back. He's trapped, or so it seems.

Tommy closes his eyes, takes a deep breath, and *shoves*.

His hands slide smooth as stream water out the grip and then he's running, cold stone thudding beneath his boots as fading shouts race behind him.

Fuck. That guy is - he's powerful, with all the wealth. He might actually try to pursue Tommy.

Maybe it's time he packs it up and moves to another city. Somewhere with less ridiculous bread prices.

Tommy makes a final vault over a wall ledge and finds himself tucked between a crevasse in the bricks, damp moss pressing his puffed cheeks like a sandwich. There's nothing but another wall before him, and a two-story drop.

Perfect. He'll just hide here for a while, return to his shelter later, and then pawn the necklace and gold off a few weeks later when suspicion has died down.

All in all, another successful heist.

~\*~

Well. That was certainly something.

"You lost him?" Phil asks again. It's not really for clarification at this point - quite frankly, the burning shame of losing a footrace to some random child is hilarious to see on another soldier.

"Yes, sir," the soldier repeats. He shuffles his feet back and forth like a nervous recruit on the first day, and eventually coughs out a "*sorry*."

Phil decides he should probably stop the mocking for the day.

"Alright," he hums. "You're dismissed back to the ship. Tell Techno I'll be back later today."

With a quick nod, Phil is left alone again.

Well. He's got a mystery to solve. After all, the way that child had escaped his grip, like minnows darting between tight fingers - perhaps the soldier's race was doomed from the start.

~\*~

The child is well hidden, but within this mortal plane Philza is about as close to a god as one could possibly get. And so it takes a mere searching hum for the pearls of his necklace to reveal their locations to him.

Taking shelter on top of a church is a bold move, especially given all the tales of the Prime God's punishments. Though, this city is technically part of the Sparklez Kingdom, which has an infamously lax culture on how they treat their own gods.

But again - the only god-like being around here who would care is Phil, and for entirely different reasons.

"Hello," he says as he lands and folds his wings back tight, voice loud and injected full of cheer. "You left before you could introduce yourself!"

There is silence from the mess of wood and scrap that makes up the home. Silence, and the rapidly seeping aura of fear.

"Why don't you come out and we can have a nice little chat," Phil continues. He makes sure to keep his grin steady, head tilted. "I mean, surely it'll be more pleasant than having it *in* your house."

It's a - well, Phil doesn't like the implication that he's threatening a child.

Oh, who is he fooling? He's totally threatening a child. With the destruction of said child's house too.

And people say *Techno* is the orphan obliterator. Hah.

There's a shuffle. He snaps his head back to the fur flap.

Something clinks. And then-

"It's not a house."

Phil chuckles. For once he's glad his sword and sheath are tucked out of sight beneath his cloak.

"Alright, mate. Mind coming out?"

A few more seconds of silence. He wonders why it feels like he's coaxing a stray ocelot out with fish and the promise of warm beds.

Wilbur's laugh echoes faintly in the back of his mind, teasing.

Oh dear.

The flap shifts. And slowly, the child from before - who can't be older than 11 or 12 - drags himself out.

Phil's first thought when he sees the stony expression is *weren't his eyes green before? How do they look so blue now?*

The next thought is-

"You look thin."

"No shit," the child snaps back. He tugs his jacket, swaths of fabric far too big, closer around his frame. "You here just to mock me? If not then get on with it."

Winters are hard, and even harder for those without work.

"I'm not here to hurt you," Phil says. "You can keep all that stuff."

The child's scowl deepens.

A smart one, then.

"I just want some questions answered in return," Phil continues.

"What kind of questions?" The child shifts to the side, just a bit. Closer to the roof's edge.

Phil would normally counter with his own movements, but he remembers the sensation of letting the child go so clearly. As though his fingers were still slipping through a phantom shoulder.

"Let's start with your name."

The child squints.

"Tommy," he says - almost hesitantly. "Just Tommy."

Tommy, hm? A... relatively normal name around here. And no family, as expected.

"And Tommy - you're human, aren't you?"

Phil watches carefully, but the reaction is a mere confused scowl, eyes quirking back in consideration.

"Yeah?" he says, like he's been asked whether ice is cold or if the stars twinkled at night.

"Are you sure?" Phil presses nonetheless. "I promise I won't judge, given - well."

He lifts a plummy black wing.

Tommy is clearly used to seeing hybrid traits, given how he merely shrugs in return.

“I’m human,” he says. “Not sure why you’d think otherwise.”

*Hm. Maybe it was just a rare fluke.*

No one’s ever successfully stolen from him, though. It’s why he considers the risk of displaying his power so prominently worth it, at least for now. The Antarctic Empire requires its reputation of might to continue.

“Nevermind then,” Phil says, letting the matter drop.

He has more important matters to deal with than tracking down some street orphan, even if said child managed to do the seemingly impossible. Maybe he’s been letting Wilbur and Techno’s “old man” comments get to him.

Maybe he really is getting old and imagining things. Fuck, that would be annoying, even if it shouldn’t be physically possible.

“Are you done?” Tommy asks. He’s inching back towards his home again, back pressing against wood bark and knees bent down. His eyes dart around Phil, but not on him.

“Have a good day, Tommy.” Phil says in response. And then, he’s flying off.

~\*~

He believes as he’s returning to the ship which houses Techno and the rest of their Antarctic Empire crew that he’ll never see Tommy again.

He believes wrong.

~\*~

“Phil,” Techno says.

“Yes?”

“Someone stole a gold ring off my finger.”

Phil raises his head from the table, blinking.

Well.

“When?”

If trying to steal from Phil is like plucking a needle from a haystack, trying to steal from Techno is like plucking a needle from a wheat field while running from a hundred dive-bombing eagles.

“The morning, when I was on the harbor,” Techno says. He narrows his eyes. “Some child with blond hair, blue eyes weirdly like yours?”

Phil groans, and drags himself up.

“Let’s go,” he says almost wearily. Only Techno - or Wilbur, if he had been there - would have been able to pick out the tint of excitement in his voice.

~\*~

“Not my fault you’re all so terrible at guarding your stuff,” Tommy snaps. “Strutting around with shiny things clinking everywhere, just begging to be stolen.”

“Do you have any idea who we are?” Techno asks incredulously. Phil has to hide a snort at the reality of a tiny child scolding them on how badly they guard their valuables.

“Rich idiots,” Tommy snaps back, hunching further. “Now fuck off.”

Phil reaches up to rub a side of his temple.

“What the fuck,” he mutters, and adds louder, “listen, Tommy - are you *sure* you’re just a human?”

“Are you two really that desperate?” Tommy asks, glancing from Phil’s wings to Techno’s crimson eyes. “There’s a lot of hybrid orphans on the streets around here. Go bother them instead.”

*None of them can do what you can,* Phil thinks. And he would know - so many have tried.

He glances at the shabbled excuse of a shelter Tommy lives in. Then the sunken shallows of his cheeks, the way his body sways like a dance with the winds taunting around them.

“Phil,” Techno says lowly, warningly, somehow still able to remember the signs.

Phil allows himself a quick, tiny sigh, and then puts on a smile.

“We could use someone of your ability, so why don’t you come back to our ship with us?” he asks Tommy brightly. “There’s even free food.”

*“Phil!”*

# would you love me more, if by the sun and moon i swore

## Chapter Notes

Phil's children...don't act like fools.

Phil is strange. His - son, apparently - is also strange. The one with the long pink hair named Techno, that is.

His *other* son is not just strange, but also a bitch.

“What kind of name is Tommy?” are the first words out his mouth when they’re introduced to each other, because apparently if Tommy’s going to be living with them on their fancy warship while they go back to their fancy castle he should “get to know them” or something weird like that.

Tommy wants to kick this Wilbur person in the balls already.

“A great name, fuck you,” he snarls. “Picked it myself, unlike yours. Parents must have hated you to give a dumbass name like *Wilbur*. ”

Phil clears his throat.

Oh, right. He’s the father. Though wait, how does that work? Techno has small tusks like a pig but also fucking creepy sharp teeth, and Wilbur seems as human as Tommy does. But Phil is - a bird. Or something like that. How does that even work? Who the fuck did he fuck and how could there possibly be children like this as a result?

“What a gremlin,” Wilbur says. “Phil, does your next one really have to be *him*? ”

Tommy stiffens.

Right. On one hand, whatever gig Phil has for him could be the route to a stable source of food and an actual functioning roof that won’t randomly collapse on him.

On the other hand, he could have just handed himself over to a - a slave trafficking ring or something. The only reason Tommy agreed was because ridiculously rich people have others do the dirty work of recruiting for them.

So, *probably* not a trap. Maybe. If it is he could just - well.

He’ll find a way out. Somehow.

He does wonder why Phil's so insistent on introducing the rest of his family though. What does that have to do with any sort of work he might be given?

Besides, this family is fucking weird.

"He's very quick," Phil says. "Quicker than you, for sure."

"What am I supposed to be doing again?" Tommy asks over Wilbur's spluttered response.

The other three share a glance. The kind people give each other for some sort of silent agreement, like Tommy's seen street gangs do when coordinating a heist.

He's always stayed away from those groups, despite multiple offers for him to join.

"Let's get you a room first," Phil says. "We'll discuss details later."

Tommy shifts uneasily, but doesn't protest as Phil leads him into the living compartments of the ship. Apparently, his new room will be right next to Techno's.

Strange fucking people.

~\*~

"He's a strange one, isn't he?" Techno hums. Wilbur rolls his eyes.

Tommy is nocking another arrow a little ways away, their shooting range targets already surrounded by them. His lips purse up tightly as he releases again.

This one actually hits a target. Probably the intended one too.

"Something caught Phil's eye," Wilbur says. "Something really notable, I'd say. But he doesn't seem to have any idea."

"Might be one of those things that manifests later," Techno says.

"Way later? Or conditionally?"

"We don't know."

Wilbur nods, in that way he's seen Phil do so many times when he has no real response.

There shouldn't be any risk with taking in Tommy right now, given how he's - well. Eleven, and clueless. The weight of the Antarctic Empire has yet to hit him.

Still, though. It never hurts to keep an eye out. He can do at least this much, when Techno and Phil are off spinning legends from nothing but the frost-tinged dreams of warriors and bloodlust.

He haunches his shoulders back, and perks his posture up.

Tommy looks up well before he's close, tiny scowl never leaving his face. It's rather adorable, really.

"Why'd you choose Tommy as a name?" is the first thing Wilbur asks.

Tommy stiffens, and whirls around with his teeth already bared. A fighter, truly.

"I like it," he snaps. "Now fuck off."

Tommy. Common name, especially around here, though usually short for Thomas. So very... basic.

Well, that can't do. Introducing themselves as Techno, Wilbur, and then *Tommy*?

They'll have to come up with something better eventually, even if it's just a formality. Strangely enough, the name *Tommy* rolls off his tongue easier now.

"So, Tommy," Wilbur grins. "What can you do? Besides poorly shoot a bow, that is."

"I could throw a knife in that smug face of yours," Tommy huffs. His voice rises high, pitched. "Fuck off and leave me alone."

Wilbur laughs.

Well, they have to start somewhere. If Phil's really that insistent on this new acquisition...

"Let's put away the violence for now, little gremlin. Tell me, do you know how to read?"

~\*~

Tommy is eleven when Phil (and Techno, but mostly Phil) leads him on board a ship with the Antarctic Empire's flag waving brazenly high among the masts. He is eleven when he molds himself in the oceans of his mind, and the reflections of his body, knowing on his deepest, darkest level that to survive is to change.

He is eleven when Wilbur begins teaching - or rather, re-teaching him his letters, his words, the world. When Techno throws down swords and daggers and bows and poisons and has him practice their uses again and again - how to kill, but more importantly, how to defend.

He is eleven when Phil wraps his arms from beneath his own and a curtain of feathers descends around him, and suddenly the winds are but a companion to dance the skies with, no longer so unreachable.

He is eleven when he is, for the first time since his kidnapping, taught how to survive by others instead of himself. When that net of safety stretched large and solid beneath him once more.

However, it takes two more years, when he's thirteen, to begin realizing its implications.

~\*~



“Why me?”

It’s about time he asked this question. Tommy’s surprised he never found it necessary before.

“You’ll have to elaborate,” Techno says. He throws the sword aside, signalling the end of this particular training session.

“Why did Dad adopt me?”

He hadn’t questioned it two years ago, still thinking in the context of the obvious, the present. The Tommy of now, however, is not the same.

“You successfully stole from him,” Techno shrugs. Then he pulls a face. “And me, too.”

“Isn’t that a really dumb reason to adopt someone?”

“Yep,” Techno says.

Tommy stifles a squawk.

“You weren’t supposed to actually agree!”

“Me and Wil thought he was crazy,” Techno says, tone flat as always. “We were just beginning to build the Antarctic Empire and you were just some random kid who’s good at being a nuisance-”

“Fuck you!”

“-so really, we were taking a huge risk there. Still not sure why, but I guess there was something about you that led Phil to see potential.”

“Potential for what?” Tommy asks. “I thought he just wanted me to work or some shit, but then you guys just kept giving me food and stuff without demanding anything else.”

“You looked sad and lonely.”

“That’s - that’s not a reason!”

Techno pauses, and takes a nearby towel to wipe his face clear of sweat.

“I really don’t know either,” he shrugs. “But I don’t regret any of it. I know Phil and Wilbur don’t either.”

And that should be the important part, shouldn’t it?

~\*~

“Dad,” Tommy says. The sound echoes like a ghost through the throne room, no one but its target around to hear.

“Yes?” Phil asks. He’s hunched over a dead goat splayed on its side across a table, knife in hand and blood dripping down his fingers. A large cut in the goat’s belly streams blood into a bucket below. It’s eyes are wired and glass, mouth still open, horns curled and resting like fallen trees.

Tommy hesitates. His feet shuffle over the cold gray floor, protected only by a pair of wooly socks.

“Tommy? Do you need something?” Phil glances from the carcass to him, eyes furrowed. Coils of goat innards, intestines and stomach, drip blood and slimy mucus in his hands.

“I was just wondering where you were,” Tommy says. “Techno and Wilbur went off to do their - their things. Again.”

There’s a *splish* and then *plop* as the tangle of guts are dropped into the bucket. Phil begins cutting away beneath the skin, blood-matted fur lifting higher and higher.

“I’m here if you need me,” Phil says, eyes peering into the goat’s empty stomach cavity. A frown purses his lips, and just a moment later he’s reaching his hand inside again.

Tommy shuffles closer, until he’s brushing just behind his father’s feathers.

“What are you doing?” he asks.

Phil blinks.

“Preparing dinner, I suppose,” he says. “Do you want to try?”

The acrid sting of blood is so much worse without the distance to disperse it. Tommy reaches both hands to cling onto a wing, and tries not to breathe through his nose.

“Nope,” he says. Phil shrugs. His hand pulls out with another section of - probably a liver? And dumps it into the bucket with another bloody *plop*.

Then he begins cutting beneath the skin again.

“Dad,” Tommy whispers again.

“Yes?”

“Why are you building the empire?”

Phil - his dad - stills.

Tommy wordlessly gestures towards the emptiness around them. The throne room of glittering diamond floors, chandeliers like the stars and moons were hung on them, tapestries by the most renowned of artists in the world once surrendered for mercy at their feet.

The throne itself, sprawling empty.

The room, sprawling empty, save for a table off to the side, a dead goat, and two figures standing together.

“It’s just a fun project for me and Techno,” Phil finally says. He takes a nearby towel off the table and begins wiping his hands. “Don’t get too worked up over it, okay? It won’t last forever.”

Tommy bites his lips. Manages a nod. Something like a needle begins stitching his body’s innards.

“Okay,” he says.

The stench of blood and death is overwhelming. Too much.

He should go find Techno or Wilbur.

## that i would never flee?

### Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

“So you wanna create a monopoly on *drugs*? ” Tommy splutters.

“It’s a good idea!” Wilbur presses his hands into Tommy’s shoulders, nodding furiously.

“Listen, I talked to so many people about this. Manberg supplies the majority of drugs and wine down this side of the continent. If we could monopolize the whole thing and get an organized supply line going without the Dream’s taxes-”

“Wilbur,” Tommy interrupts. “Wilbur - we can’t *stop* everyone else from growing weed. We can barely grow enough ourselves for *you* to use.”

“Dad uses drugs?” Fundy perks up.

“Fundy!” Tommy yells. “You know that was a - a *rhetorical* question! You’re fucking older than me, you should know-”

“Tommy, Tommy,” Wilbur laughs. “Calm down! We don’t need to farm drugs when we can buy up all the land and pay people to farm it for us. Where do you think all that money I asked Dad for is going to?”

Tommy groans, slumping into his chair. He can’t believe that for once, *he’s* being the rational one.

“We’re going to be one of *those* people, aren’t we?” he mutters. ““Oh, how did I create my drug empire? Well, first I asked daddy for a small loan of a million emeralds, and then I ruthlessly bullied all my opposition into handing over-”

Wilbur clears his throat.

“It’s a calculated investment. Don’t you want glory, Tommy? Profits? So much money!”

Tommy shrugs. Quite frankly, he thinks Dad and Techno have brought more than enough glory and riches to last their entire family a hundred lifetimes.

“Think of the power! The money! The fun!”

That last part catches his attention - and it seems to catch Fundy’s too.

“Drug empire does sound fun,” Fundy says. A fluffy tail whips back and brushes Tommy’s arm, tickling.

“Sure, sure,” Tommy yawns, stretching. But now he’s fighting down a grin of anticipation regardless.

~\*~

It's him. It has to be.

The child, with a new family and new goals. Everything warped out of the world's set balance.

Dream draws the axe up against his side, tighter. Presses against the trunk, the branch below him. Looks down at the child, giggling among the flower fields with another, both with eyes blue.

His eyes are *blue*.

*Blue yawning like the oceans and clear as summer skies, like the glint of end-diamond and brimming with joys of icelands.*

His expression is set so different too. Like an entirely new person. New being. Atrociously normal, painted over with none of the depth required.

Someone has *molded* him, and it's not the pretender who calls himself a brother.

Dream will have to find that person eventually. And perhaps exchange more than just a few words.

*Of course he finds his own way back*, he realizes as a flower, is tucked behind an ear, pale yellow and soft as down feathers.

*He found his way to freedom first. Now he's finding his way back home.*

It's okay. He hasn't completely screwed everything up yet. He can work with this.

Dream stills his breaths, smooths his chest flat. Everything is articulate around him, from the forest rustling to every rise of fur his cloak brushes against his neck like tiny coloring paintbrushes.

He still has a chance. He can work with this.

He won't screw this up again.

~\*~

*Dream tracks them down to a pitiful, huddling mass begging for mercy, swearing the child has escaped to the unknown somewhere along the journey.*

*Killing them gives no satisfaction. The trail is cold. He has failed, the first in history.*

~\*~

The drug empire turns out to be less "drugs" and more "build a whole fucking nation, what the fucking hell Wilbur where in the fucking shitty name of Philza did you get that idea

from.”

They tack an “L’” in front of the region of Manberg, call it “L’Manberg.” Something about this place’s ethnic group (or majority ethnic group, anyway) originating from a place northwest with that original prefix, and appealing to a national identity - though that country, if it ever existed, has long since fallen to time.

Then, they fight a war.

~\*~

“Wilbur,” Tommy says. “Wilbur, you have to stay still.”

“Fuckin’ hurts.”

“I *know* that.”

At the words, Wilbur finally stops struggling. Something like fear creeps into his eyes - fear, and the flooding dam that could be called regret.

Tommy wipes an alcohol-soaked rag against the wound in Wilbur’s side again, and tries not to think about it. He can’t. All this - the war, L’Manberg - it has to mean something. It *has* to.

“Maybe - maybe this whole thing was a bad idea,” Tubbo says. He looks moments away from crying again, face already cracked with salt and stains.

Maybe. But they could have backed down months ago, when Dream first scoffed at their “independence”. They didn’t.

“It’s too late now,” Wilbur croaks, a dry, hacking sound stripped of all that once made him wonderful. “If Dream doesn’t hunt down our heads, L’Manberg’s citizens will.”

“You could call Dad,” Tommy whispers, twisting down at a painful angle so only he and Wilbur could hear. “He’ll protect us. Techno can protect us. We can disappear-”

“No,” Wilbur says flatly. “Tommy, this isn’t about the - nevermind.”

He frowns, a deeply drawn expression. Too heavy, like the ash of the battlefield has clung with him even back here, in home territory.

“Think about L’Manberg’s freedom, Tommy,” he continues. “Think of our names in the history books. Think of everything we’ve sacrificed. Are we really going to just run now?”

Tubbo’s shoulders are rising higher with every word. Tommy’s aren’t.

But Wilbur stares into him with the blazing fire of conviction, with stars in his eyes and the twist of ambition lining every new stretch.

And Tommy finds himself murmuring an agreement.

~\*~

Tommy doesn't regret that agreement when he's staring down the blade of Punz's axe, Eret holding himself with an awful smugness just behind, their lives saved only by Dream's crooning warning.

Tommy doesn't regret that agreement when Tubbo and Fundy carry his limp body back to L'Manberg, his chest on fire and blood staining his skin more red than pale.

The first time he regrets his agreement to continue fighting the revolution comes when he tip-toes into Wilbur's room after a nightmare. (A familiar occurrence since the war. He wishes they would fuck off already so he's not knocking at his brother's door like a toddler, but unfortunately that's not how war works. How any of this works.)

Before Tommy opens the door he hears faint sobbing, punctuated by curses from the blue. When he opens it he's greeted with Wilbur limp as a corpse on his bed, bottles and glass shards marring the floors, the desks, the papers. The stench of stale vodka slices his nostrils with every constant inhale.

(And vodka, Wilbur? Fucking *vodka*, really?)

"Wilbur," Tommy whispers, leaning in.

Wilbur lets out another hiccupping sob, but doesn't move.

"It's all taxes this and pensions that, Tommy," he finally croaks out. "Those generals - I wanna stab those fuckers."

"That's a bad idea," Tommy, says. Though really, he has no idea. Maybe the solution is to stab people who give them problems. It always seemed to work for Techno.

He tries to keep his eye on Wilbur in the meanwhile. He really does.

He can't. Fuck.

But Wilbur simply groans again and this time a limp hand waves.

"Go away, Tommy," he mutters. "You shouldn't see me like this."

The door's shut again before the sentences are even finished.

~\*~

The pretender - so called "brother", is dying. In every way that matters.

The claws of shattered vanity sink deep, after all. Especially among these humans.

Soon he'll be dead, and the child returned to that pathetic little country.

And after that... well, he has contingency after contingency. He will not fail again.

His child will be returned. *Tommy* will be returned.

*Tommy*. What a ridiculous name. Even more ridiculously, it's starting to grow on him.

Dream fights down a scoff. Their kind don't have personalized names.

Until they do, apparently. As the revolution had progressed, and as the Pogtopia continues to plan, he's increasingly unsure he actually wants that to change.

*Tommy*. Something about the name sits more and more comfortably as said child continues his unknowing defiance.

He'll have to see. The best laid plans often go awry, after all - that's why the chessmaster always has far more than just one gambit up his sleeve.

~\*~

Tommy tries to say goodbye to Tubbo the day he leaves. He manages the first syllable before Tubbo shakes his head and nudges him, ever so gently, towards the path.

"This isn't the final goodbye," Tommy finally says. "We'll see each other again, won't we?"

Tubbo hesitates. *Hesitates*.

"Yeah," he says. He sounds so tiny.

Tommy gives him a hug, tight and warm and drawn.

And then, their backs are turned on each other - Tubbo towards the ruins of L'Manberg, and Tommy towards a future blue as the skylines.

Their steps don't match like they used to.

~\*~

Dream has to fight down another laugh as Tubbo stares, eyes narrowed, from the table across from him.

Tubbo, who is just as clueless as those original kidnappers were so many years ago. Except this time, Dream can't kill him for it. Because the President of New L'Manberg, as it turns out, is also far smarter than he's given credit for.

Pity.

The lead was so close, so tight - and then it vanished.

Mystery father and all. No one can tell him any details about that person either.

Dream stands up. Pushes in his chair, quietly.

"Thank you for your time, Mr. President," he says. He grins, though he doesn't need to.



Tubbo nods, once, eyes shadowed. Already following in Wilbur's footsteps, then.

With perfectly even breaths and a chest full of cold fire, Dream charts a course back to the castle.

## Chapter End Notes

Family runs deeper than blood, for better or worse.

# well i still taste you on my lips, lovely bitter water

## Chapter Notes

Dream scores, and loses, and scores again.

(spoilers for Valley of Serenity (more specifically, chapter 64 and beyond), the first fic in this series, and which this fic is like a small dlc attachment to. If you follow both fics, read that chapter first. If you have not read that fic, some elements of this chapter may be a bit confusing, but I think overall you still don't need much background knowledge - just that Season 2 never happened, Wilbur doesn't die, and after Nov 16 SBI spent 2 years chillin' together. The stuff in this chapter won't be major spoilers because that fic doesn't really have those, but it's something to keep in mind.)

*He has no gambit, no plan, nothing, the sky shattered and void shunted dark.*

*He has nothing but old regrets and the bitter taste of defeat.*

~\*~

Tommy is in the dark.

There are pale lights, illumination. In the darkness they float, high and low and sideways and back, deep violets and cerulean and blue light pale like pieces of a clear summer sky.

Clementine is curled beside the rock on which he stands. She's a good dog - a good friend, maybe, even. Techno wasn't wrong when he said an emotional support animal would do him well.

She's fiercely protective, too, when she perceives a threat.

There's few threats here. It's him and the crystals, and Techno hovering close in the darkness enveloping...

And Dream.

"Someone has probably died in this cave," Tommy says. There is history here, like there is history in all places, ancient whispers still echoing ever so faintly.

"I am aware," Dream says. His tone is even, too heavy.

Tommy moves to sit down on a nearby rock. Clementine scoots over. The stone is cold beneath him, firm, damp with dripwater, slightly prickly with mineral build-up.

It's a new feeling.

Dream does not sit; remains standing. Tommy thinks he sees the mask shift slightly, again, into something more hard-edged.

Dream does not use his hands to shift that mask.

"You've been busy," Dream finally says. His gaze swivels up.

A shrug, a non-reply. "I wouldn't say *busy*. "

What has he been busy with? Playing re-stitch with his family? Avoiding New L'Manberg for 2 years?

He's 18 now, closer to 19. He's not a child, hasn't been for a while. That is a fact.

"You've been busy changing," Dream clarifies.

Tommy resists the urge to shrug, and finds himself leaning towards Clementine's warm presence. Now, isn't *that* just the truth?

"Guess I have changed a lot, yeah."

"I'm not surprised."

"Why?"

"It's in our nature," Dream presses, something he will not let go. "To change. Especially now."

Tommy can't say that he's that utterly shocked.

This has - it's been a long time coming, realizations fed like dripstone water. And he can only reply with the logical response. The safe one.

"Our nature?"

There's so much he doesn't know.

Tommy remembers, when he first began questioning what he is, when he recalled Phil's presses - *are you sure you're human?* - when he thinks of home and skies and the nothingness of void, like fairytale illustrations splashed forever beneath his eyes in the pre-dawns of dreams.

He has suspicions. He has hunches. Dream has practically confirmed some.

What else is there to do, but ask and listen and dodge away from the inevitable?

"I know you're there," Dream says. Not to Tommy, though. Each word drags with old rainwater. "You can stop hiding. Let's not pretend I don't know where you are."

Ah, yes. After all, the darkness is everywhere and the light easily shattered. Tommy did not lead Dream into this cave alone.

Pink hair sways a curtain from the shadows, swirls closer.

“Hello, Dream,” Techno says. “It’s been a while.”

Indeed, it has.

~\*~

Dream shows no surprise. None of them were expecting him to. They’re all long past surprises, at this point. This is no grand finale.

~\*~

“You’re not human,” Techno says, eyes trained on the mask.

“I believe that is common knowledge, yes,” Dream responds. He leans down against a stalagmite.

Everyone knows about the Dreams. There’s rumors abound, but what *is* confirmed is this - for nearly 2 millenia, the Dream SMP has been ruled by a line of creatures white and black and green and void and sky and endless as the oceans.

Techno continues. “And you said ‘*our nature*’, when you talked to Tommy.”

“True.”

“So that would imply Tommy’s not human.”

Techno’s always been one for the clearly stated. Even now, Tommy can’t suppress a fond smile.

A shift. A shift - a Shift.

And Tommy Shifts in turn.

"Of course Tommy's not human!" Dream laughs. It's a wet, hysterical sound - an almost broken one, if Tommy dares analyze whatever incomprehensible nonsense goes on in Dream's mind.

"What do you mean?" he asks instead, and tries to keep the quivering of his heart away from his voice.

Dream pushes up his mask, and sighs. But he doesn't sound angry, or even exasperated. He just sounds... tired.

"Have you ever tried to find, Tommy," he says. "Your biological parents?"

He has to know, to know, to know, what has Dream kept from him, what does Dream want, why did he do what he has done, what's happened to him, what does *he* want, how does he keep his family safe, the darkness is cold and colder and the ancient of this cavern sings sings sings-

A warm weight rests on his shoulder and-

*The sky draws upon itself.*

It's Techno. Techno, strong and steady and dependable and he's glaring at Dream with something carved, something fierce.

"You know what I mean," Dream says, and he sounds pained. "You know. You have to."

Clinking, clinking, beneath his fingers like wine glass. The light hums.

"Yeah," Tommy whispers. "I do."

# and i know i shouldn't love you (but i do)

## Chapter Notes

i debated about whether to go straight to this chapter or add the chapter of Proper Explanations from VoS, retextured. ultimately decided it's more in line with the rest of the fic to simply go straight to his chapter. so, i lied, you do actually need to read vos to understand a chunk of this.

The flock of crows erupt into furious cawing as the face morphs from its blank shadow to the mask.

Each crow is different in the way each animal is different, each being, each life. Feathers shaded like the dark northern seas, waving, rippling, swallowing every vision. A million glittering eyes against an endless night.

Here he will find no indication.

Dream holds up a hand. Focuses the cold void always dripping within him, usually smothered with stolen warmth - but not right now. Right now he reaches for a connection identical, and lightly drags the silk-thin thread.

A single crow flutters down from the flock like a swollen leaf, feathers puffed, the fluff of chickhood still visible in strands peeking through the glossy exterior.

“Good disguise,” Dream says. “No human would have been able to tell.”

“So you cheated,” the crow squawks, staggering to his stick-thin feet.

“I’m using every ability in my arsenal, as should you,” Dream corrects. “Now, on my count of three I want you to turn back to human form as fast as you can. One-”

A human-sized Tommy slams into his face. They tumble into the grass, heaped together, untangling to the raucous laughter of the crows canopied above.

“I told you *on the count of 3* for a reason,” Dream sighs, but this is far from the first time Tommy has pulled such a thing.

“Fuck you, bitch,” Tommy says simply.

20 years after their initial meeting, and he hasn’t forgiven Dream for his actions during L’Manberg’s existence. He never will, that much Dream understands as true - whereas Wilbur and Techno had never held malicious intent towards Tommy, Dream had channeled every bit of hatred for Wilbur into likewise actions.

And Wilbur is Tommy's family in every way Dream is not.

But they've reached a truce of kinds, and that has to be fine.

"Your transitions are a lot better than last time," he says, ignoring Tommy's insult. "How much did you practice?"

Dream needs to be sure Tommy's not over-exerting his body. He's made that mistake a few times in his younger years, and the resulting sudden slippage of control is frustrating at best. Dangerous at worst.

"Some," Tommy shrugs. "Phil took me to the End to practice there, actually. I think something about the atmosphere made it easier to concentrate on technique."

Dream has been to the End twice - firstly, to slay an ender dragon. Secondly, to collect a sample of chorus fruit and End stone. Never since.

As far as he knows, every other Dream had a similar aversion to the dimension - one that he now knows is learned, not instinctual, as Tommy has no trouble waltzing between the worlds with Philza's allowance.

He doesn't want to think about Philza today.

"Native habitat," Dream says instead. "Makes sense."

Tommy hums, and tilts his head to the black caucus above. "I also figured out some other bird forms. Watch this."

The entire flock shatters into the sky, all screeching furiously as a giant, pink-feathered eagle tears its way through their canvas.

~\*~

Dream first met Phil fourteen years after he revealed the circumstances of their nature to Tommy. That had been the day he gained the first inklings of how he ~~his former son~~ had survived an environment so treacherous.

*"Wilbur's usually here by now," Dream comments. "Prime knows he'd never leave you alone with me on a normal day."*

*"Wil's on a long trip with Techno," Tommy says. His eyes scan the corners, clearly wary. "I got another babysitter."*

*"I'm not your babysitter," another voice interjects. Dream had been aware of the presence gliding up to Tommy, dark cloak with dark face, humming with a tinge of void. That is why there are three chairs at this restaurant table.*

*"Hello, Dream." The man's eyes hold no illusion for his mask. Dream lets the black line of smile twitch up accordingly.*

*“Hello, Philza,” he says, because there were only so many options Tommy could have brought with him. Philza had been - arguably still is - one of Technoblade’s most notorious associates.*

*Philza inclines his head.*

*Tommy’s glance between them is brief, tense; and then, a self-satisfied splits his face.*

~\*~

He’s not Tommy’s father. Tommy hates him.

He thought these facts would become easier with the passage of time.

They haven’t. Dream has realized by now that they never will.

~\*~

“The SMP didn’t feel like home anymore.”

“No.”

“So you left.”

“So I left, yes,” Dream says. He turns his gaze to Tommy, and Tommy finds it so incredibly unfair how much hidden fondess still rises like foggy mist in those green, green eyes.

“After 200 years. Just - you just up and left.”

“Yes.” Dream picks at the dandelion in his hand, twirling off each floret of seed, and they both watch them lift with the breeze.

“What about...” Tommy frowns. “Isn’t George’s grave still there? With a whole memorial and everything.”

“George told me he didn’t want to hold me back from life. He didn’t want me to hang onto him forever.”

“Like a - a *you should move on* kind of thing?”

Dream nods, the first sign of nonverbal expressiveness this entire conversation.

“He - he specifically said I should live for the present. For the other people I care about.”

“Well, lot of good you’ve done for... uh, the 70 years he’s been dead.”

“I’m here now, aren’t I?”

“What do you-” Tommy fights down a incredulous expression. “Since when have *I* been on the list of people you care about?”



Dream sighs, again. The dandelion twists like pinwheel, white wings billowing, until finally all that is left is a tiny stick of stem he tosses to the nearby grass.

“Tommy,” Dream says quietly. “You’re the only person left in this world I care about.”

Something unpleasant curls in Tommy’s heart, old wars and scars still not faded, the faintest choke of gunpowder.

“That makes only one of us,” he says.

“I know.”

Dream sounds far too resigned.

With a sigh, Tommy slips down from the large boulder they’d both been sitting on. His feet hits soft grass, bare, dewed with cold drops tickling every delicate hair.

“Come on,” he says. The world is cold, and endless, and nothing is perfect, but the day is young and full of possibilities. “I’ll race you to the beach shore.”

Dream is sliding down a moment later as well, wings already half-morphed.

## End Notes

while you don't need to have read anything else to understand this fic, it is the backstory fic for Tommy in the universe Valley of Serenity, my other fic, is set in. it can function as its own story though.

anyway, the reason this exists is because mollypollykinz and i shouted about a certain topic over discord for like two hours one night and she badgered me into writing this, so really everything that happens here can be blamed on her.

Please [drop by the Archive and comment](#) to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!